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EDITORS Steven J. Garfinkle, Department of History, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA 98225, e-mail: garfins@wwu.edu
Marc Van De Mieroop, Department of History, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, e-mail: mvl@columbia.edu

EDITORIAL OFFICE Steven J. Garfinkle, Department of History, MS-9061, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA 98225-9061, Tel: +1 (360) 650-3456, Fax: +1 (360) 650-7789, e-mail: garfins@wwu.edu

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JOURNAL COORDINATOR Zofia Szafrńska-Czajka, e-mail: zofia.szafranska-czajka@degruyter.com

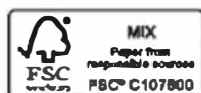
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COVER ILLUSTRATION Winged Hero Contesting with Lion Demon for Bull, Mesopotamia, Neo-Babylonian period (ca. 1000–539 B.C.), The Morgan Library and Museum, New York. Morgan Seal 747



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Sacred Spaces and Liminal Behavior in Levantine Temples *in Antis*

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Abstract: Temples *in antis* provide clearly defined liminal spaces for ritual behaviors that are readily recognizable both textually and archaeologically. This architectural form and the religious tradition it embodied were remarkably widespread geographically and temporally, spanning the Levant and Greater Syria from the end of the Early Bronze Age until the early Iron Age. Although the Southern Levant has been characterized as highly urbanized during the Middle Bronze Age, settlement pattern analysis suggests that it was fragmented into numerous polities, as documented subsequently in the Late Bronze Age Amarna Letters. In contrast, Levantine towns and villages shared a common religious tradition marked by ritual behaviors within clearly marked liminal spaces. These behaviors are readily recognizable archaeologically at Tell el-Hayyat, Jordan, where they are framed in temple enclosures by distinct architecturally-defined boundaries, and signaled by feasting on sheep and goat, and deposition of copper-alloy figurines, tools and metallurgical remains. These lines of material and architectural evidence, and the liminal behaviors they reflect, linked villages and towns in localized Levantine polities, as exemplified among a cluster of settlements in the northern Jordan Valley. Parallel sequences of four temples *in antis* at Tell el-Hayyat and nearby Pella (ancient *Pihilu* in the Amarna Letters) developed in tandem through the Middle Bronze Age, suggesting that temple construction and rebuilding was coordinated between town and village communities. Further examples of temples *in antis* and patterns of material deposition and liminal behavior suggest that this temple form and its associated ritual tradition were spread throughout the Southern Levant as part of a much larger and longer-lived cultural tradition extending across Greater Syria, which has been characterized as a Middle Bronze Age cultural *koinè*. Thus, despite its fractious local political environment, Middle Bronze Age Levantine society was grounded in a remarkably broad cultural

*Corresponding author: Steven E. Falconer, Department of Anthropology, University of North Carolina Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA, E-mail: sfalcon1@uncc.edu

Patricia L. Fall, Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of North Carolina Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA, E-mail: pfall@uncc.edu

tradition marked by the sacred spaces and liminal behaviors associated with temples *in antis*.

Keywords: temples *in antis*, Southern Levant, liminality, ritual behavior, Bronze Age

1 Introduction

The archaeology of complex societies has long concentrated on the roles of central places and the social and political institutions they housed as a means of comprehending the integration (and periodic disintegration) of heterogeneous societies. While acknowledging the importance of linkages between central and disparate elements in these societies, non-central settlements, communities and social groups have tended to be relegated as peripheral elements in complex systems to be contrasted with “centers” or “cores” (e.g., Rowlands et al., 1987; Champion 1996). Alternatively, the concepts of “marginality” and “liminality” illuminate the myriad ways in which the interactions of varied peoples and communities wove complex social fabrics. Our study utilizes the concepts of liminality and marginality to consider sacred spaces and social interactions within and between Middle Bronze Age communities (ca. 2000–1500 BCE) in the Southern Levant (Figure 1).

The concepts of both marginality and liminality recognize the importance of boundaries but entail fundamentally different social actions at these boundaries. Most simply, marginality is tied to the concept of the “other” (Cullen and Pretes 2000), such that marginal social entities may be defined (especially by self-identified “central” entities) as lying at or near the edges or margins of society. This concept also may carry connotations of being near the limit of economic (e.g., agricultural) viability, and of being spatially and socially tangential. Each society produces its own definitions of centrality and marginality (Lefebvre 1991), in which the attribution of marginality also may be conflated with aspects of self-ascribed ethnic identity (Barth 1969). For example, southern Mesopotamians adhered to a rigid social hierarchy in which they portrayed themselves at the center of the social universe, while “others,” even those in their midst (e.g., the Amorites) were relegated in their estimation as marginal (Garfinkle 2020). Therefore, marginality lies very much in the self-interested eye of the beholder and accordingly is fundamentally contingent on a viewer’s own identity and the criteria they choose to apply.

The concept of liminality as derived from the Latin *limen*, meaning “threshold,” has a long pedigree in anthropology relating to individuals or

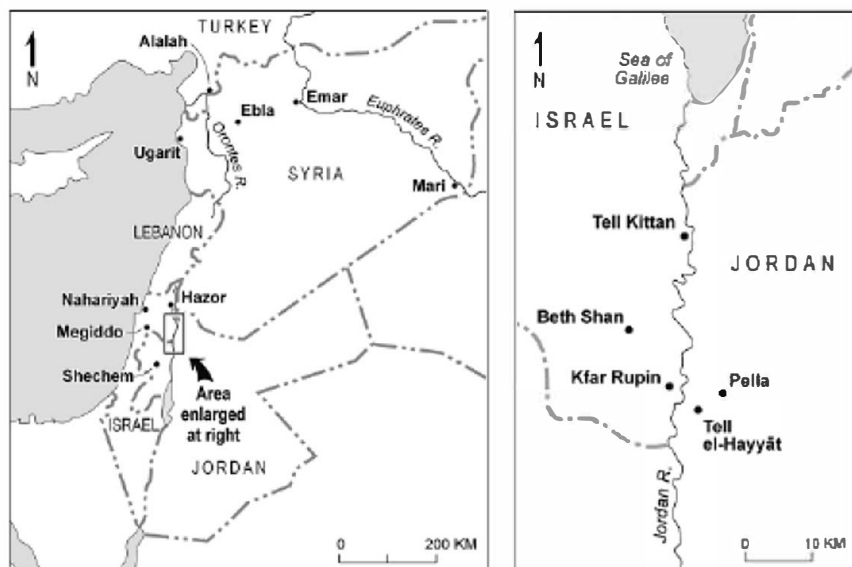


Figure 1: Map of the Levant and Greater Syria showing archaeological sites with temples *in antis* discussed in text. Enlarged map at right shows sites in northern Jordan Valley settlement cluster (drafting by Barbara Trapido-Lurie).

communities occupying a space on or across a social boundary or threshold. Classic studies of liminality investigate the boundary between stages of separation and reintegration in society, especially life cycle rituals that move individuals from one stage of life to another (e.g., van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969). Briefly stated, liminal places are made remote socially, and incorporate thresholds within which people are cut off from the outside world to bound experiences that differ from those of everyday life (Turner 1973; Thomassen 2009; Ahlrichs et al. 2015). However, both van Gennep and Turner expanded their considerations of liminality, in van Gennep's case to include calendrical transitions. Expanding further, Rubenstein (1992) and Marriott (2021) analyze the calendric festivals of Purim and Holi as times of liminality featuring role reversals and “bizarre rituals” (in Rubenstein's words) during sacred Jewish and Hindu religious observances.

In archaeology, a broadened appreciation of liminality has been applied to the interactions of communities with individuals considered to be outsiders who are of, but not in, society (Haour 2013). Ancient Levantine society depended on interactions across the social spectrum between agrarian cities, villages and pastoral communities (see Maeir et al. 2003) that would have been facilitated by liminal behaviors. In this capacity, sacred spaces associated with institutionalized

temple architecture provided clearly bounded “sacred stages” on which liminal performances took place (Susnow 2022). In the case of the ancient Southern Levant, these transitional performances marked essential links between components of society within and among Bronze Age communities.

The challenges inherent in distinguishing marginality and liminality can be illustrated briefly with two seemingly similar cases of marginal settlement in the Bronze Age Southern Levant. First, the intermittently occupied Middle Bronze Age agrarian settlement of Zahrat adh-Dhra’ 1 (ZAD 1) on the Dead Sea Plain (Fall et al. 2019) exemplifies a potentially marginal community as evidenced by its rudimentary semi-subterranean architecture, its simplified, intensively repaired and curated ceramic assemblage, its record of repeated occupations and abandonments, and its substantial distance from the nearest contemporary towns (50–55 km). ZAD 1 is an isolated example of an end-of-the-line settlement with little evidence of connections to more peripheral settlements or encampments. Thus, ZAD 1 might justifiably be considered marginal, as it lies on the backside of beyond, at the economic, social and geographic edges of urbanized agrarian Middle Bronze Age society.

Second, the concept of marginality seemingly might also be applied to the widespread Early Bronze IV settlements found in the Negev and Sinai (2500–2000 BCE) (e.g., Rosen 2011; Haiman 2018). In the context of Bronze Age societies characterized traditionally in terms of long-lived agrarian urbanism, these widespread smaller communities could readily be considered marginal. Non-sedentary Early Bronze IV settlements on the arid southern fringes of the Levant would have lain at or beyond the limits of agricultural viability, like ZAD 1, and they date to the most dramatic interval of town abandonment in Levantine prehistory. However, unlike ZAD 1, which would have been an outpost of agrarian society, these Early Bronze IV communities straddled the boundary between central and peripheral elements of Levantine society, as well as providing access to the mineral and pastoral resources of the Negev and Sinai, and beyond to the larger political and economic worlds of Egypt and Syria. In these senses, the constellation of Early Bronze IV settlements in the Negev and Sinai might be characterized more aptly as liminal, by virtue of their capacity to provide transitional linkages to a geographically broad social and economic region, despite their seemingly marginal locations (Cohen 2019).

With these intertwined aspects of marginality and liminality in mind, we consider a) the fractured Bronze Age political landscape of the Southern Levant; b) the broad geographic traditional of temples *in antis* across the Levant and greater Syria; and c) the social implications of Middle Bronze Age temples *in antis*, as

illustrated at the village of Tell el-Hayyat, Jordan, and among its neighboring villages and towns in the northern Jordan Valley.

2 Bronze Age Settlement and Society

Our study is set in the larger context of Bronze Age society in the Levant and Syria, which has been characterized traditionally in terms of early urbanism, its abandonment and redevelopment, between about 3500 and 1200 BCE. Incipient walled settlements emerged in Early Bronze I (Philip 2003), followed by larger and more numerous fortified towns in Early Bronze II–III, time periods often combined to reflect a lengthy initial era of urbanism (Greenberg 2019; Philip 2008; de Miroschedji 2014). The ensuing Early Bronze IV Period (or Intermediate Bronze Age) witnessed the pervasive abandonment of these towns in the Southern Levant, although many large towns continued in greater Syria. Traditional social interpretations emphasize a shift to seasonal transhumant pastoralism (Dever 1995), while a variety of more recent studies elucidate the importance of widespread communities engaged in agropastoralism and resource extraction across the Southern Levant (Cohen 2009; Falconer and Fall 2019; Richard et al. 2010; Prag 2014; D'Andrea 2014). The subsequent Middle Bronze Age has long been celebrated as an urban apex (e.g., Dever 1987; Ilan 1995) during which walled cities reappeared rapidly in Middle Bronze I and grew in size, number, and fortification during Middle Bronze II and III (Burke 2008; Bourke 2014; Cohen 2014). Following Middle Bronze Age references to Hazor and Laish in the Mari Letters, the Late Bronze Age provides more detailed historical evidence of polities in the Southern Levant, especially as depicted in the Amarna Letters (Bunimovitz 1995; Savage and Falconer 2003; Panitz-Cohen 2014). In overview, Levantine Bronze Age society has been characterized in terms of urban rise and abandonment primarily based on the settlement dynamics of fortified towns, while less attention has been paid to the social ties that joined households within communities, and linked villages, towns and cities in larger shared cultural traditions. These social ties included a shared architectural tradition of temples *in antis*, which may be conceptualized as one element in a Middle Bronze Age cultural *koinè* (d'Andrea 2019; Burke 2021), which provided “a medium for transcending encounters among individuals or groups ... of diverse social, economic, political and religious identities” (Burke 2014: 359), such as those that characterized Bronze Age Levantine society. Our study investigates sacred spaces and liminal behaviors as they reflected just such a shared cultural

tradition, which enabled Bronze Age society to persevere through the urban flux of the third and second millennia BCE.

2.1 Political Fragmentation in the Southern Levant

One salient characteristic of Bronze Age Levantine society was its fragmented political landscape, as depicted by the contentious relations among the Late Bronze Age Canaanite “city-states” documented in the Amarna Letters. A venerable collection of historical studies (e.g., Helck 1962, 1971; Na’aman 1988; Finkelstein 1996; Strange 2000) portrays the Amarna Age Southern Levant as a disarticulated array of modestly sized “city-states.” Helck (1971) delineated 23 Canaanite polities on a purely historical basis, while subsequent studies supplemented the Amarna Letters with other textual and archaeological data to identify 14 to 32 localized polities with estimated radii smaller than 20 km (Na’aman 1988). These studies use the term “city-state” rather axiomatically without suggesting that Late Bronze Age society involved state-level administration on a local or regional level. Spatial analysis of Late Bronze Age site locations (Savage and Falconer 2003) plots a constellation of 24 site clusters that corresponds remarkably well with the geographical configuration of polities inferred historically from the Amarna Letters (cf. Bunimovitz 1995: fig. 6 & Savage and Falconer 2003: fig. 4). In short, both historical and archaeological analyses reconstruct a fractious countryside balkanized into a shifting array of relatively small, disputatious polities.

Based on the general congruence of historical and archaeological reconstructions of the Late Bronze Age political landscape, the configurations of Early and Middle Bronze Age Levantine polities, which are not documented historically, can be estimated based on k-means cluster analyses of period-by-period settlement distributions from Early Bronze I to the Late Bronze Age (Falconer and Savage 2009). The results of these analyses suggest dissolving political coherence through Early Bronze I–III as settlement clusters become less frequent and the mean number of sites per cluster declines, while cluster radii average only about 8–9 km (Table 1). Opposite trends characterize the evidence from the Middle through Late Bronze Ages, during which settlement clusters become more abundant, with increasing numbers of constituent sites per cluster, and more tightly defined clusters with mean radii of about 7–8 km. In other words, the Middle and Late Bronze Ages experienced a proliferation of more numerous, densely populated and clearly defined settlement clusters representing potential polities. Interestingly, the locations of these settlement clusters shifted dramatically through time in some sub-regions, especially in the Judean

Table 1: Results of K-means cluster analysis of Bronze Age settlement patterns demonstrating the fragmented political landscape of the Southern Levant (data from Falconer and Savage 2009).

Period	No. of sites	K-means clusters	Mean sites per cluster	Mean cluster radius (km)
LB	474	24	19.8	7.6
MB II/III	247	24	10.3	7.5
MB I	118	19	6.2	6.7
EB III	212	17	12.5	8.4
EB II	297	17	17.5	9.2
EB I	374	20	18.7	8.9

Hills (Falconer and Savage 2009: fig. 9.6), while they remained remarkably stable in other sub-regions, most notably in four locations along the Jordan Valley (Falconer and Savage 2009: fig. 9.5). One of these clusters, which persists through the entire Bronze Age, includes Pella (ancient *Pihilu* in the Amarna Letters) and a relatively dense array of hamlets, villages and towns at the fertile confluence of the Jezreel and Jordan Valleys. The Galilee, lying just north of this polity might be considered a liminal zone with cultural ties that shifted north or south through time from the Jezreel to the Litani River, whereas the settlement stability around Pella suggests a more persistent polity just south of this liminal zone.

These trends played out against a larger regional backdrop in which settlement systems in the Southern Levant were only modestly hierarchical (Falconer and Savage 1995, 2009), with no evidence of “capital” cities or supra-kin-based state-like authority (e.g., Savage et al. 2007). None the less, the authors of the Amarna Letters clearly portray themselves as leaders of local polities engaged in problematic internecine politics, but also with a shared Canaanite identity that included subservience to the Egyptian crown. Interestingly, there is little archaeological evidence that suggests how these entities cohered politically. On the other hand, temples *in antis* provided clearly bounded settings for broadly shared liminal behaviors that linked households with their communities, and villages with local towns in the Southern Levant.

3 Temples *in Antis* Across Greater Syria

Temples *in antis* represent one of the most enduring and widespread traditions of ritual architecture in the ancient Near East (e.g., see Trow 2015). This temple form was spread broadly across greater Syria primarily in the Middle Bronze Age, with

early examples dating to Early Bronze IV (e.g., Tell Mardikh, Tell al-Rawda) (Matthiae 2007, 2009; Castel 2010) and later instances from the Late Bronze and Iron Ages (e.g., Ugarit, 'Ain Dara, Tell Tayinat) (Yon 2006; Abu Assaf 1990; Harrison 2009). Geographically, these distinctive temples were found in the major cities of the Northern Levant eastward along the Euphrates in Upper Mesopotamia. Ritual precincts set in distinctly urban settings are complemented by temples in villages as small as Qara Quzaq (1.6 ha; Cooper 2006) and Tell Kabir (2.3 ha; Porter 1995).

The importance of urban ritual centers is reinforced in several Syrian cities that featured sacred precincts with multiple contemporaneous temples. At Tell Mardikh (ancient Ebla), Temples HH5 and HH4 represent smaller and larger temples *in antis*, respectively, both dating to Early Bronze IV (Matthiae 2007), while the twin temples in Area E at Tell Meskene (ancient Emar) provide moderately-sized Late Bronze Age examples of contemporaneous sacred spaces (Margueron 1982). At Tell Chuera, a sequence of seven temples dating from the Early to Late Bronze Ages includes three contemporary temples *in antis* (Steinbau I–III) within a common walled enclosure (Orthmann 1990). This patterning is capped on a grand scale at Mari, where the Lion Temple is situated near a large palatial structure within a clearly bounded sacred enclosure (Margueron 1984: 48). In overview, Bronze Age communities across Greater Syria were home to a widespread array of temples *in antis* ranging in size, with several instances of multiple contemporaneous temples, or temples and palatial structures, clearly bounded together within enclosure walls.

Syrian temples employed terminology, concepts, and rituals similar to those in Mesopotamia (Xella 1982) mixed with elements of local Syrian belief and practice (Margueron 1982). Temples commonly were referred to as a “house of the god” in which priests provisioned a deity, washed and clothed its image, and occasionally paraded divine images before the population (Dalley 1984: 116; Susnow 2021). In Turner’s terms, temples were spaces “betwixt and between” the realms of divinity and humanity (Turner 1967, 1974). Ritual texts (Matthews 1978; Pardee 2002) describe a variety of religious practices that were explicitly liminal, many involving transitional ceremonies in which social relations were constantly manipulated and renegotiated (Bell 1992: 130; Dietler 2011). For example, accession rituals legitimized the installment of new officials, from kings to priestesses (Fleming 1992: 180–182), while other rituals marked calendric transitions with regularly scheduled feasts, sacrifices and processions (Fleming 1992: 236–48; Pardee 2002; Hundley 2013: 119; in keeping with Turner’s [1969] analysis of the installation ceremony for Ndembu chiefs). Ancestor worship featured ritual meals and the raising of memorial *stelae*, which often were grouped in pairs or in larger numbers (Graesser 1972; Talon 1978; Levine and de Tarragon 1984). Both historical

and archaeological studies (e.g., Garwood 2011; Trow 2015; Susnow 2021, 2022) highlight the importance of temple thresholds as liminal settings for transitional rituals. Inside these thresholds, temple *cellae* would have limited the number of participants, leaving these interior spaces as a domain of specialists in which rituals addressed the care and maintenance of the divine. In contrast, rituals beyond temple thresholds (e.g., in temple forecourts) opened important possibilities of expanded visibility and participation (Renfrew 1994: 47; Trow 2015: 227). Ritual performances at roof top altars would have been highly visible and yet inaccessible, thereby conveying a message of exclusive religious authority through the use of liminal boundaries (Dovey 2008: 10; Ristvet 2014: 60).

Although Syrian temples most often were urban phenomena, the presence of temples in the countryside is implied by a variety of ancient texts (e.g., Matthews 1978). In one instance, a king of Mari scheduled a trip that included stops at local shrines to pay homage to the resident gods. Before leaving his capital city, the king sent messages to village leaders assuring them that he would not usurp their authority during his visit. On another occasion, a local tribe petitioned the king of Mari for the return of its “gods” so that proper sacrifices could be made in the village. In this context, ritual pilgrimages have long provided a powerful avenue for ritually imposing the power of central authorities on peripheral communities (Geertz 1985; Kertzer 1988; Morinis 1992; McCriston 2011: 22; Ristvet 2014: 68–71). All of this evidence provides a broad backdrop of bounded sacred spaces for liminal ritual activities whereby large communities articulated with peer and smaller settlements in architectural settings shared across the Levant and Greater Syria. Within this larger tradition, we explore the social implications of ritual architecture and behavior in the Southern Levant at the Middle Bronze Age village of Tell el-Hayyat, Jordan and among Tell el-Hayyat’s neighboring villages and towns in the northern Jordan Valley.

4 Tell el-Hayyat

The archaeological evidence from Tell el-Hayyat, Jordan highlights the importance of ritual behavior in the life of an agrarian village during the Middle Bronze Age of the Southern Levant (Falconer and Fall 2006). This 0.5 ha settlement in the northern Jordan Valley was occupied through six stratified architectural phases, beginning with Early Bronze IV deposits in Phase 6 and concluding with the remains of Middle Bronze III structures in Phase 1 (Table 2). Bayesian modeling of 31 AMS seed ages suggests occupation between about 1950 and 1650 cal BCE (Fall et al., 2020). Its modest size, when correlated with population densities of traditional Middle Eastern farming communities (e.g., Kramer 1982), suggests a

Table 2: AMS chronology and noteworthy features at Tell el-Hayyat. AMS ages based on calibrated phase boundary medians produced by Bayesian modeling of 31 radiocarbon ages using Oxcal 4.4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2009; 2017) and the IntCal 20 atmospheric curve (Reimer et al. 2020) (see Fall et al. 2020).

Phase	Period	AMS age (cal yrs BCE)	Noteworthy features
1	MB III	1711–1660	Fragmentary stone-founded domestic architecture; Tell el-Hayyat abandoned at end of phase
2	MB II/III	1779–1711	Fourth temple <i>in antis</i> , stone-founded with enclosure wall; basalt pedestal in temple forecourt; stone-founded mudbrick houses; domestic courtyards; earthen and stone-paved alleys
3	MB I/II	1798–1779	Third temple <i>in antis</i> , stone-founded with enclosure wall; standing stone alignment in temple forecourt; mudbrick houses; burned house interior; domestic courtyards; earthen alleys
4	MB I	1834–1798	Second temple <i>in antis</i> , mudbrick with enclosure wall; cluster of standing stones in temple forecourt; pottery kiln; mudbrick houses; domestic courtyards; earthen alleys
5	Early MB I	1887–1834	First temple <i>in antis</i> , mudbrick and rammed earth with enclosure wall; standing stone in temple forecourt; transitional EB IV/MB I pottery
6	Late EB IV	1921–1887	Initial activity at Tell el-Hayyat; earthen use surfaces at center of tell; pottery exclusively EBIV

community of about 100 people. Analysis of carbonized plant remains portrays Tell el-Hayyat as populated by farmers who cultivated a range of annual crops (wheat, barley, pulses) and perennial orchard fruits (olives, grapes, figs), while animal bone analysis indicates herding of sheep, goats, cattle and pigs (Falconer and Fall 2006: 65–82).

At first blush, the settlement at Tell el-Hayyat might be considered a marginal farming community. Its small size places it toward the lowermost end of the Middle Bronze Age settlement size hierarchy in the Southern Levant (Falconer and Savage 1995), thereby making it hierarchically subordinate to virtually every other contemporaneous sedentary community in its vicinity. On the one hand, Tell el-Hayyat lay in a central heartland of dense agricultural settlement in the northern Jordan Valley amid a constellation of cities (e.g., Pella, Beth Shean, Rehov), towns and villages. Tell el-Hayyat’s size seemingly rendered it marginal to these larger neighbors, as an outermost node in Middle Bronze Age social, economic and political networks. In contrast, this study argues that consideration of Tell el-Hayyat as marginal overlooks the more important integrative functions performed

in the *liminal* spaces and social practices evidenced in Bronze Age settlements ranging from diminutive villages to walled cities.

Liminal behavior at Tell el-Hayyat is manifested most clearly in association with its stratified series of four Canaanite temples *in antis* in Phases 5–2, dating from early Middle Bronze I to Middle Bronze II/III (Falconer and Fall 2006: 83–110) (Figure 2). A number of salient features define the Tell el-Hayyat temples and enable comparison with temples *in antis* elsewhere locally and regionally. These temples feature characteristic *antae* that framed their entrances. At Tell el-Hayyat, each temple was founded directly on the remains of its predecessor, more than doubling in size from 40 m² in early Middle Bronze I (Phase 5) to 85 m² in Middle Bronze II/III (Phase 2). All four temples were built of mudbrick, on foundations that developed from rammed earth in Phase 5 to multiple courses of stone by Phase 2. In each case, the temple entrance faced east southeast, outside of which lay a forecourt clearly bounded by a *temenos* enclosure wall. The central feature of the interior or *cella* of the first three temples was a circular depression, which marked the position for a cylindrical basalt pedestal that was used in Phases 4 and 3 before being relocated to the temple forecourt in Phase 2, where it was excavated *in situ*. The threshold of the largest temple (Phase 2) was demarcated by two long basalt slab steps, which visitors would have ascended to an interior floor elevated above the village street level. While basalt orthostats are found in many Middle and Late Bronze Age Levantine temples, these steps and pedestal are the only basalt elements amid the otherwise limestone and mudbrick architecture of Tell el-Hayyat, and the nearest sources of basalt lay 40–50 km distant in northern Jordan and in the Jezreel Valley near Megiddo (Philip and Williams-Thorpe 1993; Adams et al. 2014). Thus, these visually distinct basalt steps and pedestal provided highly overt markers of liminal settings at Tell el-Hayyat, including the very threshold used to enter its most prominent temple.

Other important interior features, as exemplified in the first two temples, were stepped mudbrick altars ensconced in their northeast corners and low mudbrick benches along the walls of the *cellae*, both of which provided offertory settings for a variety of preciosities. The most prominent features of the temple forecourts were standing stones or *stelae* (up to 80 cm tall) accompanied by flat-lying stones in the Phases 5–3 temple forecourts: a single *stela* in Phase 5, a cluster of *stelae* around the northern *anta* in Phase 4, and an alignment in a shallow arc across the Phase 3 forecourt. Much of the Phase 2 forecourt, including the likely positions of further *stelae*, extended beyond the excavated area of the site.

Each iteration of Tell el-Hayyat's *temenos* wall marked a physical boundary that separated differing behaviors and scales of participation within and without. Interestingly, the front *temenos* wall for the Phase 3 temple fell over intact, quite

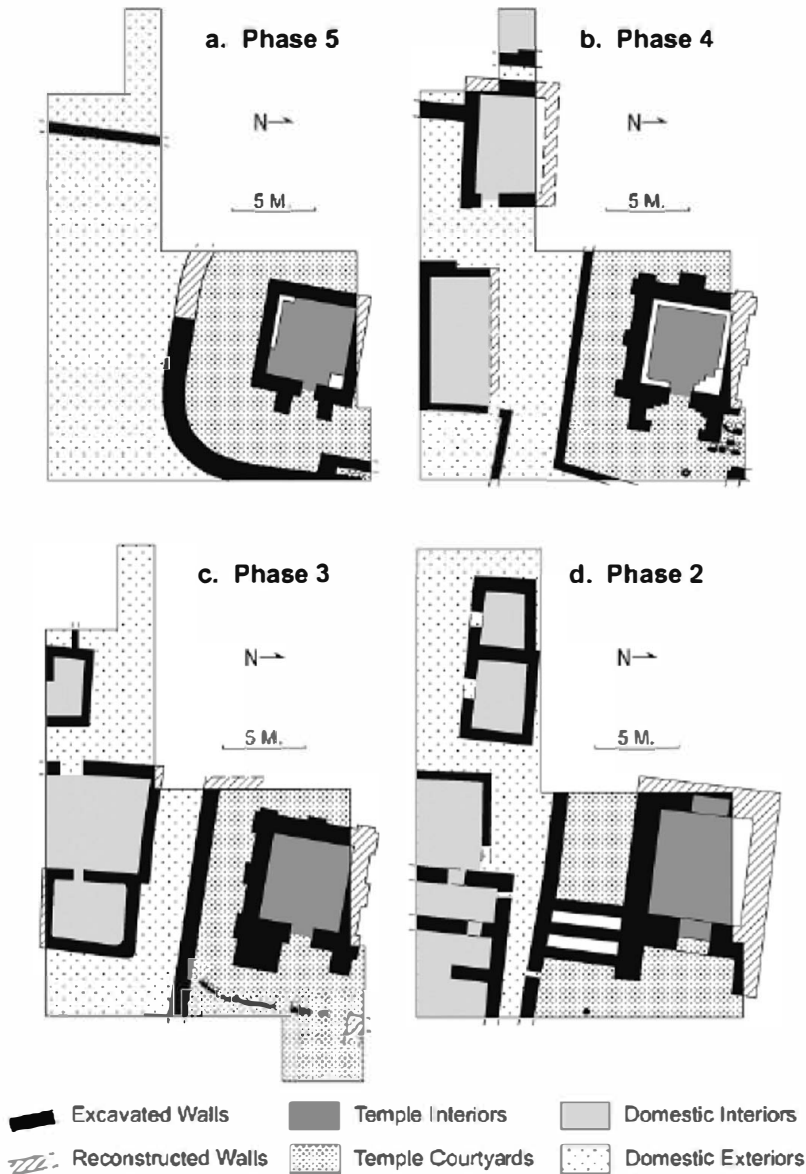


Figure 2: Architectural plans of Phases 5–2 at Tell el-Hayyat. Temple interiors in Phase 5 (a. early MB I) and Phase 4 (b. MB I) have mudbrick altars in their northeastern corners and low mudbrick offertory benches along their walls. The Phase 5 temple interior has pebble-lined depressions for potstands. The temples in Phase 4 and in Phase 3 (c. MB I/II) have central depressions for a basalt pedestal that was excavated *in situ* from the temple forecourt in Phase 2 (d. MB II/III). Stelae in temple forecourts are shown as dark; flat-lying stones are shown in outline (drafting by Barbara Trapido-Lurie).

possibly intentionally, allowing its standing height to be estimated at almost four meters (Falconer and Fall 2006: 96–99). Enclosure walls on this scale would have precluded visibility of the temple entry and forecourt, thereby adding a sense of mystery to the communal rituals they circumscribed. Visual access to local residents could have been provided by performing rituals on a higher visual plane on the temple roof. While the *antae* for the first two temples primarily frame their doorways, the southern *antae* of the last two temples (Phases 3 and 2) were enlarged to provide the foundations for towers in which stairways led to their roofs where formal rituals performed at rooftop altars (as exemplified at Late Bronze Age Ugarit) would have been particularly impressive, while remaining viewable only at a distance (Figure 3). Thus, the individuals entering these temple compounds would have experienced a liminal transition from their day-to-day activities to a tightly cloistered stage on which ritual observances left very distinct material signatures that have been recovered archaeologically.

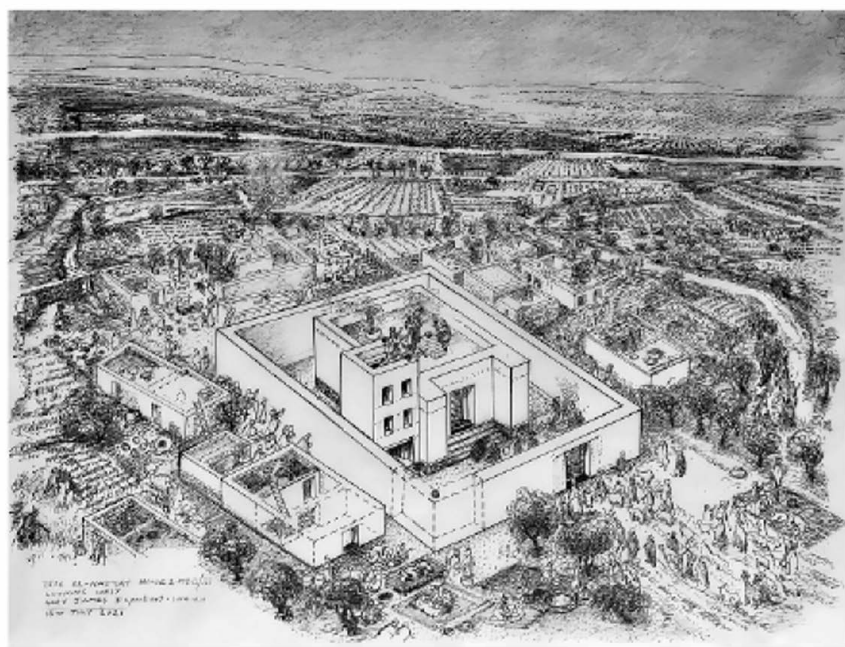


Figure 3: Artistic depiction of the village at Tell el-Hayyat during Phase 2 (Middle Bronze II/III), facing west across the Jordan Valley (portrait by Gary James). The temple threshold was marked by black basalt steps, and the high temenos wall would have restricted access to the temple forecourt. The temple roof top would have provided a ritual stage visible only at a distance. The tower adjoining the south anta would have provided roof access; roof top altar is inspired by interior altars in Phases 5 and 4, and remnants of a roof top altar at Ugarit.

4.1 Community Liminal Behaviors

Liminal behaviors at Tell el-Hayyat may be inferred most basically from patterns of evidence within the temple enclosures in Phases 5–2 as they compare with those from village houses, courtyards and alleyways. Patterned deposition of symbolic objects (i.e., objects with no apparent utilitarian function) in a variety of mediums constitutes a major realm of evidence in which liminal behavior in temple *cellae* and forecourts is clearly differentiated from the remains of everyday life at Tell el-Hayyat. Symbolic objects found in temple contexts include ceramic and metallic figurines, miniature “oxhide” copper ingots, miniature votive bowls and lamps, miniature ceramic cart wheels, *kemai* and incense burners. Many of these items are facsimiles of full-sized objects whose meaning is transformed within the liminal bounds of the temple compounds. For example, the cart wheels and ingots replicate full-sized objects used in everyday life or occasionally in temple ritual (e.g., carts carried divine images in rituals at Emar; Fleming 1992: 237), while votive vessels tended to be crudely manufactured miniature bowls and lamps, valued primarily for their offertory contents (Naeh 2012).

Interestingly, “the medium is the message” at Tell el-Hayyat (cf. McLuhan 1964), where the deposition of copper objects (e.g., anthropomorphic and bull figurines, tools and implements), metallurgical remains (e.g., carved limestone molds, copper slag) and personal adornments (e.g., carnelian beads) was restricted to temple compounds. In contrast, ceramic symbolic objects were found in comparable numbers in both temple and domestic contexts. Ceramic Astarte-type figurines were found in both temple and household settings, suggesting that liminal rituals were practiced by individuals and families, as well as entire communities, as paralleled by the prevalence of domestic ritual at Emar (Fleming 1992: 236–248). Parallel concentrations of ceramic figurines in domestic settings characterize a variety of sites across Syria (‘Amr 1980; Kletter 1996; Moorey 2003: 37). Aside from these intriguing, but infrequent ceramic figurines, the depositional signature of symbolic objects at Tell el-Hayyat is overwhelmingly concentrated in temple contexts, with metallic remains found *only* in these settings. These patterns suggest a clear disjunction between the material worlds associated with households and temples, and between their distinct quotidian and ritual behaviors.

Another major aspect of liminal behavior is revealed by spatial and temporal analyses of the Tell el-Hayyat faunal assemblages, which distinguish communal feasting in temple enclosures from household subsistence activities in domestic spaces. Household animal bone assemblages include fairly consistent and comparable percentages of sheep/goat and pig bones through each phase, with

lesser amounts of cattle. In contrast, animal bone assemblages from temple contexts, particularly temple forecourts, are distinguished by dense bone deposition, very high sheep/goat frequencies and much less pig, all patterns also well attested at Tell al-Rawda, Syria (Trow 2015: 220), which are consistent with ritual prescriptions in Ugaritic texts (Pardee 2002: 43, 56; Wyatt 2002: 50, 130). In both domestic and temple contexts, the majority of ovicaprid bone deposition shifts from goat to sheep through time, suggesting changing dietary preference or animal husbandry oriented more to wool production. However, these sheep:goat ratios are consistently lower in temple contexts, suggesting greater rates of goat consumption in the ritual spaces than in the households of Tell el-Hayyat. The distinct faunal signature in temple contexts at Tell el-Hayyat, which combines dense bone deposition with a pronounced emphasis on consumption of sheep/goat, accords well with the characteristics of communal feasting, based on its distinct spatial concentration, specific food source, and conspicuous patterns of consumption and disposal (Dietler 2001: 89; Steel 2002, 2004).

The animal bone assemblages from both domestic areas and temple courtyards at Tell el-Hayyat feature high frequencies of limb and trunk bones, which also may be considered signatures of meat consumption (e.g., Hellwing and Gophna 1984). In addition, temple interiors reveal elevated frequencies of foot bones that suggest skinning of animals (Klenck 2002: 76) and may reflect ritual prescriptions for certain body parts, as indicated by texts from Emar (Fleming 1992: 152) and Ugarit (de Tarragon 1980: 33). The abundance of sheep/goat bones in temple settings contrasts with a dearth of pig bones, indicating another facet of the clear dichotomy between subsistence and ritual behavior. Whereas pig consumption was an increasingly important aspect of household animal husbandry at Tell el-Hayyat, ritual feasting appears to have combined a preference for mutton from sheep, and increasingly from goat, with a possible proscription on pork.

The patterning of animal bone evidence from the temples at Tell el-Hayyat and its associated activities may be considered liminal by virtue of the distinct and tangible boundaries created by this village's temple enclosure walls, which segregated a distinct realm of ritual behavior from the surrounding world of domestic life. At this level, liminality reflects adherence to a common set of ideological and behavioral principles by multiple households within a community. The broader distribution of temples *in antis* associated with similar patterns of material evidence, allows us to explore larger social landscapes in the northern Jordan Valley and more extensively across the Southern Levant.

4.2 Liminal Relations in the Northern Jordan Valley

Within the settlement cluster that includes Tell el-Hayyat, temples *in antis* also are found in the nearby Middle Bronze Age villages of Tell Kittan and Kfar Rupin. Tell Kittan represents a rural community (0.8 ha) with its own temple complex (Eisenberg 1976, 1977). Tell Kittan was founded as an open village of rectilinear houses in Middle Bronze I. During Middle Bronze II (Stratum V), the site was fortified and the first of three mudbrick temples was built at the settlement's center, surrounded by residential architecture. The Tell Kittan Stratum V temple bears a striking resemblance to the contemporaneous Tell el-Hayyat Phase 3 temple, in its plan, scale and alignment of standing stones across the temple forecourt, which included a carved *stela* depicting a woman in the stylized pose of Astarte. The subsequent Middle Bronze III temple (Stratum IV) was built over the remains of the Stratum V temple and resembles the contemporary temple in Tell el-Hayyat Phase 2 based on its enlarged size and thickened walls, although it lacks the *antae* that normally typify this temple form. The forecourt of the Stratum IV temple may have been surrounded by an enclosure wall, and revealed ash piles with animal bones near a curved mudbrick bench. A Late Bronze Age temple in Tell Kittan Stratum III was built slightly to the north of the Middle Bronze Age temples, with an altered, reoriented floor plan. At Kfar Rupin, a small site (<1.0 ha) only a few kilometers west of Tell el-Hayyat across the Jordan River, an array of rectilinear stone foundations separated by alleyways was revealed at the bottom of a fish pond that had been drained (Gophna 1979). Amid these structures, a small temple associated with Middle Bronze I–II pottery had thick walls and overall dimensions similar to those of the Phases 4 and 3 temples at Tell el-Hayyat, with *antae* that had been extended to enclose the temple forecourt.

These village temples *in antis* are paralleled on a larger scale at Bronze Age Pella, where the main *tell* measures eight hectares (Bourke et al. 2009: fig. 1), making it a relatively large town with a few thousand inhabitants in the Jordan Valley settlement cluster that included Tell el-Hayyat, Tell Kittan and Kfar Rupin. The architecture on the main *tell* at Pella includes four stratified Middle Bronze Age temples, which are followed by two redesigned and reoriented temples dating to the Late Bronze and Iron Ages (Bourke 2012) (Figure 4). The two earliest mudbrick temples in Pella's Temple Phases 1 and 2 are ascribed to Middle Bronze I, while larger stone-built structures in Temple Phases 3 and 4 date to Middle Bronze II and III, respectively (Table 3). When calibrated, the radiocarbon age for the Pella Phase 1 temple fits well with the modeled ages for Tell el-Hayyat Phase 5, making these two phases roughly contemporaneous in early Middle Bronze I (Bourke et al. 2009; Fall et al. 2020). Later in the Pella sequence, calibration of

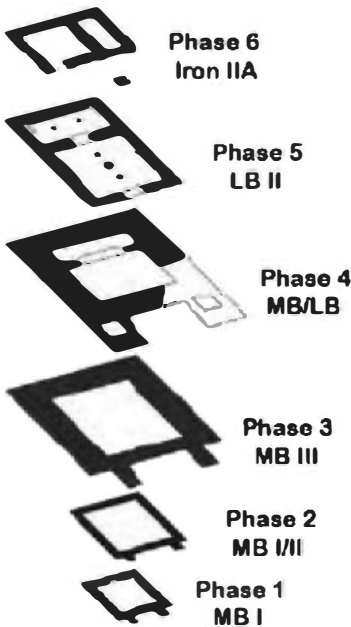


Figure 4: Sequence of six temples at Tabaqat Fahl (ancient Pella), Jordan from Temple Phase 1 (MB I) to Temple Phase 6 (Iron Age II) (after Bourke 2012: fig. 3). The sequence of Middle Bronze Age temple construction and rebuilding in Pella Phases 1–4 (MB I–MB III) parallels the temple sequence at Tell el-Hayyat Phases 5–2. Note the subsequent temple redesign without antae in Phase 5 (LB I I) and reorientation in Phase 6 (Iron Age II).

Table 3: Bronze Age temples in the northern Jordan Valley (data from Falconer and Fall 2006: 86–101; Eisenberg 1977; Gophna 1979; Bourke 2012).

Site	Level	Period	Exterior size (m)	Exterior area (m ²)
Tell el-Hayyat	Ph. 2	MB I I/III	8.3 × 10.2	85
Tell el-Hayyat	Ph. 3	MB I/II	6.9 × 7.4	51
Tell el-Hayyat	Ph. 4	MB I	6.9 × 7.2	50
Tell el-Hayyat	Ph. 5	MB I	6.1 × 6.7	41
Tell Kittan	Str. III	LB	6.9 × 8.9	61
Tell Kittan	Str. IV	MB I I/III	11.5 × 14.3	164
Tell Kittan	Str. V	MB II	5.5 × 6.9	38
Kfar Rupin		MB I/II	5 × 6	30
Pella	Ph. 6	Iron IIA	8 × 12	96
Pella	Ph. 5	LB IIB	12 × 18	216
Pella	Ph. 4	MB III	24 × 32	768
Pella	Ph. 3	MB II	16 × 22	352
Pella	Ph. 2	MB I	8 × 10	80
Pella	Ph. 1	MB I	7 × 9	63

two radiocarbon ages from the Phase 4 temple place it in Middle Bronze III, slightly later than the Phase 2 temple at Tell el-Hayyat.

The first two Pella temples were deliberately leveled to a height of about 40 cm, or three brick courses, prior to subsequent rebuilding. The Phase 3 temple had stone walls two to three meters thick that were preserved up to four meters high. The Phase 4 temple has a number of noteworthy features, including a cross wall that created a discrete interior sanctuary, white plastered floors, a southern tower that probably incorporated stairs to the roof, and a portion of an enclosure wall outside the southern temple wall. The temple forecourt was repaved with several layers of fieldstone cobbling, and the total effect of the Phase 4 rebuild was to create a more impressive entry and façade for the temple and thereby enhance its settings for ritual ceremonies.

As at Tell el-Hayyat, sheep/goat constituted the most common taxon among animal bones from the Pella temples (Bourke 2012). The limited remains of ritual objects associated with the first two Pella temples include fragments of gold foil, blue faience, ivory statuettes and carved wood. Outside the Phase 3 temple was a 4 × 4 m storeroom with two stratified layers of plaster-lined mudbrick bins that contained a variety of special use objects, including an alabaster flask, a gypsum cup, and a ceramic bowl adorned with four rams head handles (Bourke 2012). Additional pottery included miniature bowls, jugs and funnels, as well as fine ware juglets and carinated bowls. Nearby was a series of small stone and plaster-lined water collection pits linked with ceramic piping. Evidence like this is found most often in mortuary settings (e.g., Guy 1938: 72, pl. 37; Smith 1973: 174, pl. 20) and may denote funerary libation ceremonies dedicated to the care and feeding of ancestors (Pitard 2010).

The temples *in antis* in the northern Jordan Valley provide archaeological signatures of ritual behavior within bounded sacred space that was shared among village and town communities within one inferred Bronze Age polity in the Southern Levant (Figure 5). Elsewhere in the Southern Levant, a network of Bronze Age temples *in antis* extended to cities and towns (Hazor, Shechem and Megiddo), more peripheral towns like Tel Haror in the northern Negev, and villages like Nahariyeh near the Mediterranean coast. The temple *in antis* at Nahariyah dates early in the Middle Bronze Age (Mazar 1992), and measures about the same size as the Phase 5 temple at Tell el-Hayyat, while at Tel Haror, a stratified series of three Middle Bronze Age temples in strata V–IVa (Katz 2000; Klenck 2002) are similar in scale to the largest (Phase IV) temple at Tell Kittan. The temples at Shechem (Strata 1a & 1b; Wright 1965), Megiddo (Temple 2048; Dunayevsky and Kempinski 1973) and Hazor (Area H; Ben-Tor et al., 1997) approximate the size of the Phase 3 temple at Pella, while the subsequent Pella Phase 4 temple emerges as the largest Levantine temple *in antis*.

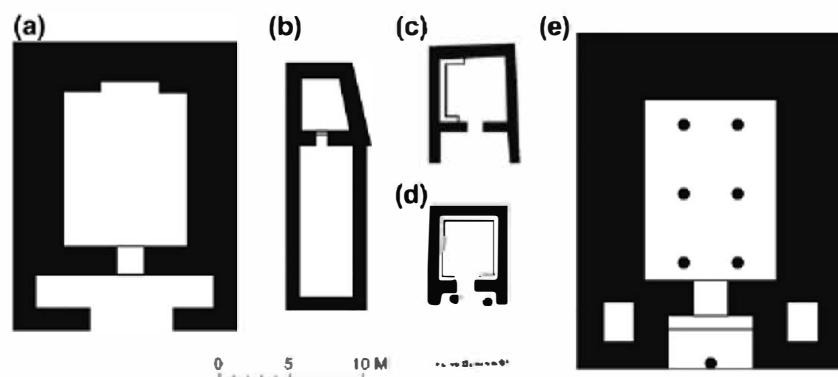


Figure 5: Middle Bronze Age temples in antis from towns and villages in the Southern Levant: (a) Megiddo, Temple 2048 (Dunayevsky and Kempinski 1973: fig. 2), (b) Kfar Rupin (Gophna 1979: fig. 2), (c) Nahariyah (Mazar 1992: 162), (d) Tell Kittan, Stratum V (Eisenberg 1977: 80), (e) Shechem, Temple 1a (Wright 1965: fig. 41) (drafting by Barbara Trapido-Lurie).

Aside from the single (unexcavated) temple at Kfar Rupin, all of the Levantine sanctuaries comprise stratified sequences of two to four Middle Bronze Age temples. At Pella and Megiddo, these sequences continue with redesigned, reoriented temples in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages. While temple enclosure walls commonly bounded courtyards around individual Levantine Middle Bronze Age temples *in antis* (e.g., Tell el-Hayyat, Tel Haror, Megiddo, Hazor, Pella), Late Bronze Age Hazor provides the only setting that might represent a ceremonial precinct with multiple institutional buildings. In this case, Hazor's "Black Building" may represent a temple *in antis* or a Syrian-style palace (cf. Bonfil and Zarzecki-Peleg 2007; Ben-Tor 2008). This building is complemented by an adjoining "White Temple" (which may date earlier) and the nearby "Long Temple" (Zuckerman 2012).

The Middle Bronze Age temples at Pella describe a legacy of ritual behavior in evolving architecturally defined sacred space, which finds parallel expressions on smaller scales in the development of temples at nearby villages like Tell el-Hayyat, Tell Kittan and Kfar Rupin. In all of these communities sacred and utilitarian settings are clearly bounded. In each settlement sacred and non-sacred spaces are linked by liminal behaviors whereby individuals or households coalesced to perform socially-acknowledged rituals communally. Likewise, common subscription to these ritual behaviors and their underlying belief system provided communities ranging from hamlets like Tell el-Hayyat to towns like Pella with a set of liminal behaviors that enabled them to transcend their spatial separation and inequities in size, economic base and political authority. These bonds reflect the

likelihood that Tell el-Hayyat and Tell Kittan may have been villages administered as holdings of temple estates, quite possibly supported by patronage from larger communities that shared the tradition of temples *in antis*, as exemplified at the nearby town of Pella. In particular, the sequences of virtually contemporaneous, intentional temple levelings and rebuilds at Tell el-Hayyat and Pella reflect planning and social authority on a community and possibly polity-wide basis. Thus, the cohesion, such as it was, of Bronze Age Levantine polities may have found its basis in mutually-acknowledged Canaanite ritual involving liminal behaviors that transcended the boundaries between the everyday life of individuals and households, and the corporate life of communities and polities.

5 Conclusion

This study applies the concept of liminality as a means of comprehending social cohesion in Levantine Bronze Age society at three levels, as inferred from: 1) evidence for formally bounded sacred space and liminal communal behaviors in temples *in antis* that enabled the coherence of villages like Tell el-Hayyat, Jordan through the Middle Bronze Age, 2) expressions of temple architecture and liminal sacred space shared among villages and towns in a potential Middle Bronze Age polity in the northern Jordan Valley, including parallel sequences temples *in antis* at villages (Tell el-Hayyat, Tell Kittan) and towns (Pella), and 3) regional patterns of temples *in antis* that indicate a larger tradition of ritual behavior that was shared among villages, towns and cities across the Levant and Greater Syria.

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